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Report of the Economic and Social Council

Proposed programme budget for the biennium 2002-2003

Revised estimates resulting from resolutions and decisions adopted by the Economic and Social Council at its substantive session of 2001

Report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions

1. The Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions has considered the report of the Secretary-General on revised estimates resulting from resolutions and decisions of the Economic and Social Council at its substantive session of 2001 (A/C.5/56/4). During its consideration of the report, the Committee met with representatives of the Secretary-General, who provided additional information.

2. The net estimated additional requirements for the biennium 2002-2003 arising from the resolutions and decisions adopted by the Economic and Social Council at its substantive session of 2001 amount to $1,964,000 (ibid., para. 28). The estimated additional requirements relate to Economic and Social Council decisions 2001/218, 2001/292 and 2001/293 on the United Nations Forum on Forests and 2001/316 on the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, as well as to the extract from the report of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights at its twenty-fifth session concerning the outcome of the review of its methods of work (E/2001/L.8). No additional conference-servicing resources would be required, as provision is made in section 2, General Assembly affairs and conference services, of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2002-2003,[1] not only for meetings already programmed at the time of budget preparation, but also for meetings or extensions of meetings that might be authorized subsequently, provided that the pattern of meetings was consistent with past years (see A/C.5/56/4, para. 3).

3. By its resolution 2000/35 of 18 October 2000, the Economic and Social Council decided to establish the United Nations Forum on Forests as a subsidiary body of the Council. It also decided that the Forum would hold a short organizational session, as soon as possible, to elect officers and to decide on the location of its secretariat, and that the Forum, at its first substantive session in 2001, should adopt a multi-year programme of work and decide on the venues of its future sessions.

4. The Advisory Committee notes that at the time of the preparation of the initial budget estimates for the biennium 2002-2003, it was not possible to assess resource requirements for the functioning of the secretariat of the Forum, as decisions on the multi-year programme of work, the location of the secretariat and the secondment of staff had yet to be taken at the Forum's session in 2001 (ibid., para. 5).

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5. At its organizational session, in February 2001, the Forum decided to locate its secretariat at Headquarters in New York. By its decision 2001/218 of 3 May 2001, the Economic and Social Council decided that the first and fifth substantive sessions of the Forum would be held in New York and that two of the three intervening sessions would be held in Geneva and one in San José, Costa Rica. The Forum adopted a multi-year programme of work at its first substantive session, in June 2001, and the Council, by its decision 2001/293 of 25 July 2001, took note of the report of the Forum on its first session.

6. The secretariat of the United Nations Forum on Forests will form part of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and will report directly to the Under-Secretary-General (ibid., para. 12). The Advisory Committee notes that the secretariat of the Forum currently consists of eight posts (2 D-1, 1 P-5, 2 P-4, 1 L-7 and 2 General Service (Other level)) and one Junior Professional Officer. At present, all of the posts are funded through extrabudgetary resources. The Committee notes further that sufficient extrabudgetary resources are available to enable the current staff to continue until the end of 2001.

7. The proposal is for the secretariat of the Forum to comprise six established posts (1 D-2, 1 P-5, 1 P-4, 1 P-3 and 2 General Service (Other level)) to be funded from the regular budget under section 9, Economic and social affairs, beginning in the biennium 2002-2003, at an estimated cost of $754,300 (ibid., para. 14). The Advisory Committee notes that the staff complement of the secretariat is expected to be strengthened through secondments from international and regional organizations, institutions and instruments, as well as voluntary contributions. Upon enquiry, the Committee was informed that staff secondments were expected to total five for the biennium. The estimate under section 9 also provides for $256,000 for consultants, $253,600 for expert group meetings, $232,300 for travel of staff, $44,200 for general operating expenses, $5,400 for supplies and materials and $27,000 to replace office automation equipment.

8. The Advisory Committee notes that resource requirements of $119,900 were included in the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2002-2003 for the travel of representatives of member States of the Forum that are also members of the Commission on Sustainable Development and are participating in the session, and that no additional requirements were expected to arise in that regard (ibid., para. 10). The Committee also notes that travel support is envisaged for representatives of least developed countries not members of the Commission to participate in the sessions of the Forum and that such support would be provided from available extrabudgetary resources.

9. Under section 27D, Office of Central Support Services, estimates total $519,800, of which $238,000 relates to non-recurrent costs for office alterations and acquisition of furniture and fixtures, and $281,800 relates to recurrent costs for rental of premises (ibid., para. 15). Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that at present the secretariat of the Forum was located at 2 United Nations Plaza in New York. The Committee is of the opinion that the current arrangements for financing accommodations for the Forum secretariat should continue in the biennium 2002-2003; such additional requirements as may arise should be indicated in the performance reports for 2002-2003.

10. The Advisory Committee notes that, in accordance with Economic and Social Council decision 2001/316 of 26 July 2001, the first annual session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues is to be convened at United Nations Headquarters from 6 to 17 May 2002. However, it had been assumed in the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2002-2003 under section 22, Human rights, that the Forum would meet in Geneva. Accordingly, additional requirements of $54,800 would arise for the differential cost of travel and subsistence of members of the Forum ($44,000) and for the travel of two staff members to New York ($10,800) (ibid., para. 18).

11. The Advisory Committee also notes that in paragraph 22.19 of the proposed programme budget provision is made for the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights to hold three three-week sessions and three one-week meetings of the pre-sessional working group annually. However, as the result of a review undertaken by the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights on its methods of work, the Committee decided at its twenty-fifth session, held from 23 April to 11 May 2001, that for an experimental period of two years it would hold only two sessions per year. The Committee submitted an extract (E/2001/L.8) of its report to the Economic and Social Council concerning the issue. A statement of programme budget implications (E/2001/L.18) was also submitted to the Council. The resulting reduction

in costs under section 22 is estimated at $340,800, and includes reductions for travel and daily subsistence allowance for members of the Committee ($323,200) and for daily subsistence allowance for members of the pre-sessional working group ($17,600) (A/C.5/56/4, para. 23).

12. The net reduction under section 22, Human rights, of the proposed programme budget resulting from Economic and Social Council decision 2001/316 and the extract of the report of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights amounts to $286,000.

13. As stated in paragraph 9 above, the Advisory Committee is of the opinion that the requirements under section 27D, Office of Central Support Services ($519,800) (see ibid., para. 15) should continue to be met in the biennium 2002-2003 in the same manner as in the current biennium. Accordingly, the Committee recommends that the Fifth Committee take note of the estimate of $1,444,200, on the understanding that such appropriations as may be necessary will be requested by the Secretary-General in the context of a consolidated statement of programme budget implications and revised estimates to be submitted to the General Assembly.

Notes

[1] The proposed programme budget for the biennium 2002-2003 is contained in documents A/56/6 (Introduction), A/56/6 (Sects. 1-33), A/56/6 (Income sects. 1-3) and A/56/6/Corr.1. The approved programme budget will subsequently be issued in final form as *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-sixth Session, Supplement No. 6* (A/56/6/Rev.1).